

September/October 2015

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bald Mountain Mine: The BLM Ely District, Egan Field Office is asking the public to review and provide comment on the Bald Mountain Mine North and South Operations Area Projects Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The Barrick Gold U.S Inc. proposed project would expand an open-pit gold mine in White Pine County, about 65 miles northwest of Ely. The 45-day public comment period ends **Monday, Sept. 28, 2015**. *(See page 10 for more information)*

Water Canyon Wild Horse Growth Suppression Pilot Program Environmental Assessment: The BLM Ely District, Schell Field Office on **Tuesday, Aug. 18, 2015**, released a Finding of No Significant Impact and Decision Record based on the analysis provided in the final Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Water Canyon Wild Horse Growth Suppression Pilot Program. Under the 10-year program, the BLM will gather and treat wild horse mares in the project area with a fertility control vaccine to reduce the herd's population growth while minimizing the number of animals that need to be removed from the area. *(See page 14 for more information)*

Basin and Range National Monument: The Basin and Range National Monument was created on July 10, 2015, by Presidential proclamation. The monument comprises approximately 704,000 acres of BLM-administered public lands in Lincoln and Nye counties. It includes Garden and Coal valleys; the Seaman and Worthington mountains, Golden Gate and Mount Irish ranges; the Hiko and White River narrows; and Shooting Gallery rock art site. It is the first national monument managed by the BLM in Nevada. The monument was designated because of its geological, ecological, cultural, historical, paleoecological, seismological, archaeological, and paleoclimatological significance.

ELY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The BLM Ely District has completed a scheduled five-year review of the Ely Resource Management Plan (RMP), per the direction of the BLM Nevada State Office. The upcoming sage grouse Record of Decision will amend the District's RMP; no other amendments are planned.

The RMP is expected to undergo review as a result of a November 2012 Idaho District Court decision on a Western Watershed Project (WWP) challenge of 18 RMPs across six western states. The court examined as "test cases" the Pinedale and Craters of the Moon RMPs prepared by the BLM Pinedale and Twin Falls districts, in Wyoming and Idaho, respectively. The court ruled that BLM must amend the two RMPs to address identified deficiencies. The court dismissed challenges to two other RMPs, leaving 14 RMPs in place pending the outcome of the "test cases." The Ely RMP is one of the 14 remaining RMPs.

Although the RMPs identify major factors in the loss of sagebrush habitat (including energy development and livestock use), WWP is questioning whether the challenged

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RMPs sufficiently address declining Greater Sage Grouse populations. WWP contends that the RMPs in question do not reference or follow guidance from the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the BLM National Sage Grouse Strategy, BLM Special Status Species Policy and conservation assessments. The suit also contends that BLM did not consider/analyze alternatives calling for reduced or no livestock grazing, despite the fact that grazing was found to be a “major contributing factor” to the decline of sage grouse habitat.

WWP has also filed a motion to consolidate their appeal of the Ely RMP and their appeal of the Cave and Lake Valley Watershed Restoration Environmental Assessment in District Court in Idaho (*see Watershed Analysis*).

WATERSHED ANALYSIS

The Western Watershed Project (WWP) in December 2012 appealed the Cave and Lake Valley Watershed Restoration Environmental Assessment’s Decision Record for vegetation projects and Final Decision for range projects. In June 2013, WWP withdrew their appeals regarding the watershed restoration plan and instead filed a complaint with the District Court in Idaho, asking that it be consolidated with their case against the Ely District Resource Management Plan. On March 13, 2014, the District Court in Idaho denied WWP’s Motion to Consolidate, and transferred the case to the District Court in Nevada. A decision is expected from the Federal District Court by early summer 2015 regarding WWP’s motion.

The Ely District is preparing a watershed restoration plan for the South Spring Valley and Hamblin Valley watersheds. A preliminary environmental assessment (EA) is expected to be released for public comment in 2015.

The Office of Hearings and Appeals (OHA) has dismissed WWP’s appeal of the Newark and Huntington Range improvements decision. The BLM issued the Newark and Huntington Watershed Restoration Plan Finding of No Significant Impact; Decision Record for vegetation treatments; and Final Decision for range improvements in January 2015. WWP appealed the decision to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA) and Office of Hearings and Appeals (OHA). IBLA affirmed BLM’s decision for the vegetation treatment portion of the project.

The BLM expects in 2015 to release for public review the proposed watershed restoration plans for Toquop Wash and Tule Desert, and Beaver Dam Wash.

Watershed analysis has been completed on the Cave Valley, Lake Valley, Antelope Valley, North Antelope, Gleason Creek, North Spring Valley, Smith Valley, Steptoe A, South Steptoe, Dry Lake Valley, Panaca Valley, Kane Springs Wash, Clover Creek North and South, Newark Valley, Huntington Valley, and White River South watersheds.

Watershed characterization has been completed for the Long Valley/Ruby Valley watershed implementation plan and analysis has begun. It is anticipated to be complete in FY16.

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The BLM Ely District, in collaboration with the USDA Agriculture Research Station and National Resource Conservation Service, has developed Ecological Site State and Transition Models for Major Land Resource Areas 28A and 28B, which will benefit watershed planning and grazing strategies, and vegetation treatments. The models were presented at the 2015 National Society of Range Management Conference in Sacramento. The final models are now available for use. The project was funded by the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.

SAGE GROUSE PLANNING

The BLM and Forest Service on Thursday, May 28, 2015, released the Nevada and Northeastern California Sub-regional Greater Sage-Grouse Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement (PLUP/FEIS) that will help conserve greater sage-grouse habitat and support sustainable economic development on public lands. The plan is now undergoing a 60-day Governor's Consistency Review period and concurrent 30-day protest period, after which a Record of Decision will be signed.

The collaborative federal-state effort includes three key elements to conserve the sagebrush landscape, which faces threats from fire, invasive species and encroaching development: a comprehensive strategy to fight rangeland fire, strong conservation plans for federal public lands, and conservation actions on state and private lands.

The plan addresses issues identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in a 2010 determination that found the greater sage-grouse was deserving of protection under the Endangered Species Act due to the inadequacy of regulatory protections to prevent further sagebrush habitat fragmentation, placing the bird in danger of extinction. Federal protection was deferred because of higher priorities; however, the Service is required to revisit the determination by September 30, 2015.

The plan provides a layered management approach that offers the highest level of protection in the most valuable habitat, known as Priority Habitat Management Areas. Within priority habitat, the plan seeks to limit or eliminate new surface disturbance, particularly in Sagebrush Focal Areas, identified by the Service as "stronghold" areas essential for the species' survival. The proposed plan seeks to minimize disturbance in General Habitat Management Areas, which are lands that require some special management to sustain greater sage-grouse populations, but are not considered as important as priority habitat.

The plan will honor all valid, existing rights, including those for oil and gas development, renewable energy, rights-of-way, locatable minerals, and other permitted projects. The plan measures only apply to BLM and Forest Service-managed lands and minerals. To learn more, go to www.blm/sagegrouse.

ENERGY

Natural Gas-fired Energy Development -

Toquop Energy Project: The BLM has issued a Notice to Proceed to Toquop Energy, Inc., for a natural gas-fired power plant. Construction can start once the proponent satisfies conditions outlined in the Notice. Toquop Energy, Inc. is simultaneously pursuing purchasing lands necessary to construct the plant and ancillary facilities. The Ely Resource Management Plan provides for the disposal of up to 640 acres for power plant development. The BLM will dispose of no more than 200 acres because of a conflict with the Western Wide Energy Corridor.

Wind Energy Development -

Spring Valley Wind Energy Facility: The second Golden Eagle fatality in as many months was reported at the Spring Valley Wind Energy Facility on March 25, 2015. The first fatality was documented on February 9. A total of three eagles have been killed at the facility in the past three years.

The annual mortality threshold for Golden Eagles at the facility is one, in accordance with the Avian and Bat Protection Plan. It is now up to the Technical Advisory Committee, comprised of biologists representing the BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and Nevada Department of Wildlife; to determine what mitigation measures, if any, should be recommended for implementation. The BLM will approve any measures deemed appropriate.

Meantime, Pattern Energy, owner and operator of the facility, is preparing a report on the latest incident in accordance with their FWS Special Purpose Permit. The remains of the bird have been transferred to the FWS.

Spring Valley Wind has been in operation since late-summer 2012. After 533 bats were recorded killed by the wind turbines in 2013, triple the amount allowed by federal regulators, mitigation measures were initiated enacting a new “cut-in” speeds for the turbines, increasing the wind speed required to spin the turbine from 7 mph to 11 mph. In 2014 the bat mortality rates were reduced by more than 75-percent as compared to the same time frame last year. Mortality surveys completed so far this year recorded only 23 bat fatalities. Last year at this time there were 103 bat fatalities recorded.

Solar Energy Development -

Dry Lake Valley North Solar Energy Zone: The public comment period for the Dry Lake Valley North Solar Energy Zone (SEZ) Draft Regional Mitigation Strategy concluded Friday, Aug. 28, 2015. The 25,069-acre Dry Lake Valley North SEZ would be located in Lincoln County, Nev. The BLM extended the 30-day comment period to provide the public an additional 14 days to review and provide comments on the draft strategy, which can be found on the [Dry Lake Valley North Project Website](http://on.doi.gov/1frnwSM) at <http://on.doi.gov/1frnwSM>

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The draft strategy builds on the success of the Dry Lake SEZ regional mitigation strategy pilot project, which provided developers with certainty regarding the cost of mitigation and ensured that residual impacts of solar projects in the SEZ would be addressed through offsite mitigation. The strategy was integral to the recent permitting success of the Dry Lake SEZ, enabling three solar energy projects to be permitted within ten months of the competitive lease sale, about half the time of previous reviews. The projects are expected to generate between 440 MW of solar power and create up to 1,900 jobs.

Each of the 19 SEZs established by BLM is required to have a compensatory mitigation strategy, according to the Record of Decision for the Western Solar Plan.

The Dry Lake Valley North SEZ is the largest of the 5 SEZs in Nevada and, when fully built, could produce up to 4,000 MW of renewable energy. It is located about 15 miles west of Pioche and 15 miles northwest of Caliente. The SEZ is framed by the North Pahroc Range to the west, and the West Range, Bristol Range, Highland Range, Ely Springs Range, Black Canyon Range, and Burnt Springs Range to the east.

For more information, contact Dan Netcher, BLM project manager, at (775) 289-1872 dnetcher@blm.gov.

Hydro Energy -

White Pine Pumped Storage Project: Gridflex Energy, LLC, in September 2013 submitted a preliminary permit application for the White Pine Pumped Storage Project facility. Gridflex and White Pine Water Power, LLC, are proposing through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to construct a stored water pumping facility north of Ely, Nev. The proposed White Pine Pumped Storage Project would utilize three generators with a combined capacity 300 MW to generate 919,800 megawatt-hours, annually.

A permit is issued only to allow the permit holder to investigate the feasibility of the project while the permittee conducts investigations and secures necessary data to determine the feasibility of the proposed project and to prepare a license application. FERC has given the initial approvals to begin working with the BLM to develop a plan of development, begin the NEPA process, and develop natural resource and economic data. FERC will lead the project.

Electrical Transmission Development -

ON Line Project: Reclamation is in the final phases and development of a plan for wildlife and restoration monitoring is underway. The high-voltage line that connects NV Energy's northern and southern electrical grids and provides for the transmission of renewable energy was formally dedicated in January 2014.

TransWest Express Project: The Final Environmental Impact Statement on the TransWest Express Transmission Project has been released. The Record of Decision for

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the project is expected to be released in fall 2015. The 730-mile transmission line project would extend from Wyoming, through Colorado and Utah, to southern Nevada through the southeast corner of Lincoln County. It would deliver up to 3,000 megawatts of electric power to major load centers, including Las Vegas and San Diego, Calif., by tapping in to wind energy resources in southern Wyoming. The BLM Wyoming State Office is the lead office for the project.

The Zephyr Project: The BLM is scheduling public meetings and selecting a contractor to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Electric Transmission Line Project that would originate in the Wheatland/Chugwater area of Wyoming and extend 950-plus miles to Eldorado Valley, south of Las Vegas. BLM Wyoming received the application and Plan of Development in March 2012.

FIRE

Fire Management –

The BLM Ely District has received numerous fire starts, but few expanded beyond a quarter-acre in size. The district's single notable fire, the 657-acre Blue Jay Fire, burned for four days before being fully-contained on Saturday, Aug. 8. The lightning-ignited fire was located in priority sage grouse habitat about eight miles southeast of the Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The fire consumed pinion-pine, juniper, sagebrush and grasses. There was no threat to private property. The BLM utilized ground and aerial resources to suppress the fire. Assisting the BLM were the City of Ely, White Pine County, Nevada Division of Forestry, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Forest Service and private contractors.

Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation –

The Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation Plan for the Blue Jay fire has been submitted. The plan proposes aerial seeding, one-way chaining, noxious weed inventory and treatment, and livestock closure. The purpose of the treatments is to protect identified greater sage-grouse habitat destroyed by the fire. The treatment will reduce soil erosion and recover habitat function by establishing plants where there is little or no seed source available post-fire. The treatments will also benefit habitat for Mule Deer, pronghorn and elk. The goal of the noxious weed treatment and livestock closure is to reduce the likelihood of noxious and invasive weed infestation while allowing desirable species to become re-established in the burned area. If the ESR plan is funded, the treatments should be implemented during winter 2015/2016.

Fuels Reduction and Restoration –

Ward Mountain Restoration Project: The BLM Ely District, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Ely Ranger District and Ely Shoshone Tribe have prepared a Final Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Ward Mountain project. The federal agencies and Tribe are proposing to use mechanical and chemical treatments, and prescribed fire to restore

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health to vegetative communities to improve wildlife habitat and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

The proposed project area is 100,000 acres, or about 53,731 acres of BLM-administered lands, 39,264 acres of Forest Service lands, and 2,507 acres of Tribal lands. Of that, the Forest Service would treat about 14,381 acres. The BLM and Tribe have not yet determined how many acres of the public and Tribal lands would be treated. The remaining acreage is state lands or private property, which would require that an agreement be signed prior to potential treatments.

The Forest Service has prepared a Draft Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for National Forest Service lands within the project area. The Forest Service's 45 day objection period ended June 1, 2015. No objections to the Draft Decision were received. The BLM may issue a decision record in the future based on the actions analyzed in the EA.

Overland Pass Habitat Improvement Project: The BLM in April 2015 issued a Final Environmental Assessment and Decision Record for the Overland Pass Habitat Improvement Project. The project will be located in greater sage-grouse nesting, summer, and winter habitat; crucial summer, winter and transitional mule deer habitats; and pronghorn antelope habitat along the southern flanks of the Ruby Mountains in Elko and White Pine counties. The project area will encompass approximately 45,200 acres, of which approximately 18,500 acres would undergo manual, mechanical and prescribed fire treatments over a 10 year period. The project is a collaborative effort by the BLM, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and Nevada Department of Wildlife. Work will begin in the project area in the fall of 2015.

Kern Mountain Landscape Restoration Project: Weather permitting, the BLM expects in 2015-2016 to burn slash piles remaining from tree thinning treatments conducted in the spring and fall of 2014. Tree thinning and/or mastication could begin within the project area in fall 2015, depending on funding availability. The project improves watershed health and native habitat, which benefits area wildlife such as elk, mule deer and sage grouse. The project also reduces the risk of a catastrophic wildfire. The project is being implemented in accordance with the BLM Ely District Resource Management Plan and the Kern Mountain Landscape Restoration Project Environmental Assessment.

Egan and Johnson Basins Restoration Project: The BLM is preparing a preliminary environmental assessment for public review. A release date has not been established. The proposed fuels reduction and habitat improvement project would be located in the Egan and Johnson basins, about 5 miles west of Cherry Creek, Nev. The project would provide for vegetative diversity and improve wildlife (sage-grouse) habitat, as well as reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, by selectively thinning pinion- juniper. Up to 50-percent of the approximately 14,000-acre project area would be treated using manual and mechanical treatment methods, and prescribed fire. The project is consistent with the BLM Ely District Resource Management Plan.

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Duck Creek Basin Fuels Reduction and Habitat Improvement Project: The BLM is preparing a preliminary environmental assessment for public review. A release date has not been established. The proposed fuels reduction and habitat improvement project would be located in Duck Creek Basin, about 15 miles northeast of Ely, Nev. The project would provide for vegetative diversity and improve habitat for wildlife, such as greater sage-grouse, mule deer, and elk, as well as reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire by selectively thinning pinion-pine and juniper, and treating sagebrush communities. Up to 13,000 acres of the approximately 29,000-acre project area would be treated using manual and mechanical treatment methods, and prescribed fire. The project is consistent with the BLM Ely District Resource Management Plan.

Aspen and Sagebrush Steppe Joint Restoration Project with Great Basin National Park: The BLM and Great Basin National Park are expected in fall 2015 to conduct a prescribed burn in Box Canyon and Kiou Basin, in northeastern White Pine County. When complete, the project will have restored about 1,000 acres of Aspen and sagebrush communities. The project, begun in 2013, will have combined prescribed fire use with mechanical treatments that were completed in 2014. Project funding comes from Round 11 of the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.

Combs Creek: The BLM is masticating pinion-pine and juniper on 750 acres of the Combs Creek project area located in south Butte Valley, about 20 miles northwest of Ely, Nev. The Great Basin Institute and Nevada Conservation Corps have also been hand-thinning trees. In all, the BLM plans to treat 4,500 to 7,000 acres of the 23,000-acre project area to reduce fuel loading and improve Greater sage-grouse habitat by selectively thinning pinion-juniper from sagebrush communities. Implementation began in late July 2014 with funding provided by the Nevada Department of Wildlife's heritage fund program through the White Pine County Wildlife Advisory Board.

Pioche and Caselton Wildland Urban Interface Project: All major project components have been completed and the remaining slash piles will be burned in fall 2015, as weather conditions allow. The 11,300-acre project designed to improve habitat and protect area residents from catastrophic wildfire was funded by the fuels program and Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.

Patterson Pass Sage Grouse Habitat Improvement Project: The BLM in summer 2015 resumed hand-thinning pinion-juniper on approximately 1,100 acres of the project area. The BLM in January 2015 chained 1,000 acres of the project area. Approximately 3,500 acres of the nearly 4,800-acre project was already completed by the end of December 2014. The project is the first implementation of the Cave and Lake Valley Watershed Restoration Plan. Funding is provided by the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, Healthy Lands Initiative, Lincoln County Game Board and the Mule Deer Foundation.

Jakes Valley Sagebrush Restoration Project: Temporarily on hold, the project is designed to improve or restore sagebrush communities, livestock and wildlife habitat, and watershed health while reducing fuel loading by restoring Wyoming sagebrush sites in and around Jakes Wash, 20 miles west of Ely, Nev. The project calls for mowing up to

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2,000 acres of the total project area, and thinning pinion and juniper across the total project area, creating a mosaic that provides for wildlife edge areas. The BLM would seed about 60-percent of the treated area with a mix of perennial grasses and forbs.

Stonehouse Prescribed Burn: The BLM has burned approximately 30 acres of slash piles remaining from a pinion-juniper tree-thinning project near Lages Junction and Schellbourne Pass in the Schell Creek Range, about 70 miles north of Ely. The remaining piles will be burned in winter 2015-2016. The Stonehouse Prescribed Burn reduced hazardous fuels accumulations to protect the watershed from potentially large, lethal wildfires; treated fuels to improve health and restore ecological stability, reduced or halted the encroachment of pinion-pine and Utah juniper trees to restore and promote wildlife habitat resiliency, and recycled nutrients and enhanced species diversity of fire-adapted and fire-dependent vegetation.

Shingle Creek Aspen Restoration Project: Weather permitting, the BLM is scheduled to burn white fir slash piles in winter 2015-2016. The aspen restoration project is located on the west slope of the Snake Range near Great Basin National Park, about 40 miles southeast of Ely, Nev. Removing the conifers will promote aspen regeneration and health.

North Antelope Habitat Restoration: Nevada Conservation Corps crews continue to thin pinion-pine and juniper in the project area. The 12,000-acre habitat improvement project located on the north end of the Antelope Range, about 70 miles northeast of Ely, Nev., is approximately 85-percent complete.

Cold Springs Project: A contractor is thinning pinion-juniper through a service contract that allows him to purchase the product for resale. Weather permitting, the BLM is scheduled in winter of 2015-2016 to burn slash piles remaining from previous thinning efforts. The project goal is to provide a hazardous fuel break and demonstration area depicting various pinion-juniper thinning densities.

South Steptoe Valley Watershed Restoration Project: The BLM and Nevada Department of Wildlife have completed a 5,000-acre pinion-juniper chaining within the project area, located in south Steptoe Valley. Hand thinning continued this summer on an additional 2,870 acres through two contracts. The BLM expects in fall 2015 to chain an additional 2,000 acres of the project area and possibly implement prescribed fire treatments.

Lake Valley Restoration Project: The BLM and Nevada Department of Wildlife are conducting hand thinning on approximately 5,200 acres of pinion-juniper in the Lake Valley Watershed. The project implements the Lake Valley portion of the Cave and Lake Valley Watershed Restoration Plan. The thinning will benefit sage-grouse by removing trees within potential habitat.

Bald Mountain Restoration Project: The BLM is designing treatments for the Bald Mountain Treatment Unit of the Newark and Huntington Watershed Restoration Plan. The BLM will implement the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act- funded project during fall 2015 and 2016. The project will treat approximately 1,600 acres for

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mule deer and sage-grouse benefit, as well as restore approximately 25 acres of aspen. The Nevada Department of Wildlife is a cooperator assisting with treatment design.

LANDS & REALTY

Lincoln County land disposals identified in the Lincoln County Conservation, Recreation and Development Act, and Ely Resource Management Plan: The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office is currently processing three land sales, i.e., the Windmill Sale, Cowboy Sale and Hiko Sale. Lincoln County Round 3 is also being processed for four areas: Alamo, Caliente, Panaca and Pioche.

MINERALS

Active Mining Plans –

Bald Mountain Mine: The BLM is asking the public to review and provide comment on a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Barrick Gold U.S Inc. proposed Bald Mountain Mine North and South Operations Area Projects, an open-pit gold mine expansion that would be located in the Bald Mountain Mining District in White Pine County, Nev., about 65 miles northwest of Ely. The 45-day public comment period ends **Monday, Sept. 28, 2015.**

The BLM has scheduled four public comment meetings in Nevada, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. The dates and locations are:

- Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2015, Elko Convention Center, 700 Moran Way, Elko
- Wednesday, Sept. 16, 2015, Best Western Airport Plaza, 1981 Terminal Way, Reno
- Thursday, Sept. 17, 2015, Eureka County Opera House, 31 S. Main St., Eureka
- Friday, Sept. 18, 2015, BLM Ely District Office, 702 N. Industrial Way, Ely

The proposed Project would be located on BLM-administered lands and include expansion of the Bald Mountain Mine North and South Operations Areas for an additional 6,903 acres of disturbance.

North Operations Area: Combining and expanding the existing Bald Mountain Mine North Operations Area (NOA) Plan of Operations (Plan) boundary and the existing Casino/Winrock Mine Plan boundary into a unified Plan boundary called the proposed NOA Project would increase the total surface disturbance from 9,381 acres to 13,727 acres and add four new heap leach pads.

South Operations Area: In the South Operations Area (SOA), the existing Alligator Ridge Mine and Yankee Mine plans would be expanded and combined into a unified Plan called the proposed South Operations Area (SOA) Project, which would increase the total surface disturbance from 939 acres to 3,496 acres. The South Operation Area Project

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Plan of Operations would also include an electrical transmission line and an access road between the North and South operations areas.

The Draft EIS is available online at <http://on.doi.gov/14R9rZ8>. Additional information is available at <http://on.doi.gov/14vXckC>.

To learn more, contact Miles Kreidler, BLM Mining Engineer at (509) 536-1222 or mkreidler@blm.gov, or Stephanie Trujillo, BLM Ely District Project Manager, at (775) 289-1831 or strujill@blm.gov.

Gold Rock Mine Project: The BLM is preparing the Gold Rock Mine Project Final Environmental Impact Statement that is expected to be made available to the public in fall 2015.

The proposed Gold Rock Mine Project would be constructed and operated in the same geographic area as the reclaimed and closed Easy Junior Mine. The project area consists of a total of 18,745 acres of BLM public lands with the majority of the mine facilities located within a fenced mine area totaling 8,757 acres. A total of 3,946 acres of disturbance would be authorized. The majority of this area would be reclaimed, while a small portion would not. The draft EIS analyzes Midway's proposed action, six action alternatives, and the No Action Alternative. The action alternatives were developed to help reduce project-related impacts to greater sage-grouse and mule deer.

The projected mining period is 10 years, with associated construction, closure, reclamation and post-closure monitoring periods extending the project life to approximately 48 years. Midway Gold US Inc. estimates that the project would create between 150-250 jobs.

The Draft EIS describes seven action alternatives and is available on-line at <http://on.doi.gov/1zAxyW9>.

Notices and Exploration –

The BLM Ely District, Egan Field Office is reviewing a Notice of Intent for the Green Springs Exploration Project submitted in January 2015 by DHI Minerals LTD. DHI is proposing to drill two exploration holes on 1.12 acres of public land near the closed Green Springs Mine in Railroad Valley, Nev.

Meadow Bay Gold Corporation intends to drill 69 exploratory holes in and around the Atlanta Mine site, about 35 miles northeast of Pioche, Nev. The BLM approved the company's Plan of Operation for Exploration in March 2014.

The BLM is expected shortly to authorize Aurion Gold's exploration for gold at Logan Pass in the Mt. Irish Area of Critical Concern (ACEC), approximately five miles west of Hiko, Nev.

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The BLM has reviewed comments received on the preliminary environmental assessment (EA) for the Gold Springs Exploration Project, located about 20 miles east of Pioche, Nev. Gold Springs, LLC, a subsidiary of High Desert Gold, proposes to disturb up to 100 acres. Gold Springs is currently conducting disturbance on two sites of 4.9 and 2.7 acres, respectively.

Mineral Materials –

The Ely District sells mineral materials from 14 Community pits and through exclusive sale permits.

The Panaca Community Pit, near Panaca, Nev., has been determined to be located within lands identified for disposal under the Lincoln County Conservation, Recreation, and Development Act of 2004. Because the Act withdrew said lands from mineral entry and sales, the BLM can no longer sell mineral materials from the Panaca Community Pit. The Caliente Field Office has identified three potential community pit sites and is working through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

Oil & Gas Exploration/Development –

Oil & Gas Exploration/Development: The 30-day public comment period on parcels of public land nominated for potential oil and gas exploration and development concluded Friday, July 24, 2015. The BLM is reviewing the comments received and preparing a final environmental assessment.

The BLM received requests to lease 94 nominated parcels of public land, totaling 140,389 acres. The parcels have been analyzed for potential impacts in the preliminary environmental assessment (EA), in accordance with the Oil & Gas Leasing Reform mandated in 2010. Lease stipulations identified in the Ely Resource Management Plan (2008) are attached to some parcels to help protect certain resources. The preliminary EA is available for public review at: <http://on.doi.gov/1zIOyhA>.

A Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale is scheduled Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2015. Additional information about the sale including the sale notice and parcel list will be posted to <http://on.doi.gov/15sFoY0> as it becomes available.

Applications for Permits to Drill (APD): The Ely District is processing three Applications for Permit to Drill (APD). The Caliente Field Office is preparing an environmental assessment (EA) on an APD from Makoil to drill in Coal Valley. Bestoso Oil & Gas has submitted an APD for the BOG #1 well in White River Valley. A Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) is in progress. Envy Energy submitted an APD for Black Point East #1 well in Railroad Valley and an EA is underway.

Makoil's Portuguese Well in Railroad Valley near Portuguese Mountain remains active since 2014. Drilling operations have so far been exploratory in nature.

NOXIOUS/INVASIVE WEED MANAGEMENT

The BLM Ely District continues to implement the 2010 Integrated Weed Management Plan that provides for the inventory, treatment, and monitoring of non-native and noxious invasive weeds. The plan includes weed prevention procedures and treatment options, including herbicides, for use in and outside of Wilderness; as well as outreach and education measures. (Use of herbicides in threatened and endangered species habitat requires consultation.) The BLM works with private landowners, non-profit organizations and local, state and federal agencies through 10 Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs).

The district has completed this year's noxious weed inventory. Yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*) has been identified near Telegraph Canyon, which is administered by the Egan Field Office. Until this year, yellow starthistle was not known to occur within the district. Yellow starthistle is a Nevada Category A noxious weed and has proven to be very detrimental to the agricultural industry in neighboring states. As such, containment and eradication of the species is the top priority for the district's weeds program.

The district has installed 12 interpretive signs alongside the trail system at the Ward Mountain Recreation Area to educate the public about noxious weeds.

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

District staff continues to monitor and assess rangeland conditions associated with forage and water availability and coordinate with permittees regarding grazing management actions associated with drought conditions.

The BLM Nevada State Office and district/field offices in spring 2015 sent drought information letters to grazing permittees, informing them of the abnormally dry conditions, in addition to providing an opportunity to plan for changes in the 2015 grazing season, if necessary.

Staff continues to fully process and renew term grazing permits (TPR), plan range improvement projects (riparian and spring developments, fences, and more), and process grazing applications and transfers. Links to documents are located on the BLM website at: https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do

RECREATION & TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING

Lincoln County Partners Multi-Purpose Non-Motorized Trail System: The 30-day public input period for the proposed multi-purpose, non-motorized trail system to be located near Caliente, Nev., concluded on Aug. 20, 2015. The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office is reviewing the input received and preparing a draft environmental assessment (EA). The BLM expects to make the draft EA available for public review in late 2015.

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The Lincoln County Non-motorized Multipurpose Trails Project would enhance access to public lands by constructing new multi-purpose trails, and improve non-motorized recreational opportunities in Lincoln County. The development of these new trails and trailhead would not reduce access to or conflict with current recreational opportunities in the area.

Ash Springs Recreation Site: The Ash Springs Recreation Site, located alongside U.S. Highway 93 in Lincoln County, remains closed. The two-year closure notice was published in the *Federal Register* on Friday, June 6, 2014. The closure is necessary because extensive modification of the man-made pool by public users has made it unsafe and is degrading endangered species habitat. The BLM is considering management possibilities for the site, whether repairs to the pool are feasible, and if traditional uses are impairing habitat for the Federally-listed endangered White River springfish and three listed BLM Nevada Sensitive Species. Substantial repairs to the site would require additional funding, planning and coordination, which the BLM would analyze in an environmental assessment.

BLM is working closely with local, state, and federal government entities as well as residents and the newly formed Friends of Pahrangat Valley friends group to develop a management plan that will address public recreation needs while ensuring recreation uses do not impair the endangered and sensitive species or their habitat at the spring or downstream.

Nevada Department of Wildlife and BLM continue to monitor the site for biological populations and for any unauthorized visitor uses. Monitoring indicates aquatic species such as fish, spring snails, and other sensitive species have increased substantially on the BLM portion of the spring system. The appearance of the site has also improved dramatically without the high levels of public use seen prior to the closure. BLM has found evidence that some use is still occurring, mostly indicated by the trash left behind. Upland, riparian, and aquatic vegetation at the site is recovering as well.

Travel Management Planning: The BLM Ely District, Egan Field Office is preparing a plan for approximately 1,428,000 acres within the Huntington, Jakes, Long, Newark and Ruby valleys, in White Pine County. The BLM will release the draft plan for public comment.

WILD HORSES

Water Canyon Wild Horse Growth Suppression Pilot Program Environmental Assessment: The BLM Ely District, Schell Field Office on Tuesday, Aug. 18, 2015, released a Finding of No Significant Impact and Decision Record based on the analysis provided in the final Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Water Canyon Wild Horse Growth Suppression Pilot Program. Under the 10-year program, the BLM will gather and treat wild horse mares in the project area with a fertility control vaccine to reduce the herd's population growth while minimizing the number of animals that need to be removed from the area.

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The goal of the project is to maintain a healthy population of 25-30 wild horses in the Water Canyon portion of the Antelope Herd Management Area (HMA) in Eastern Nevada. The management number is based on range conditions, water availability and acreage comparisons, as well as seasonal movement of the animals during the summer and drier winter months. The current estimated population in the Water Canyon portion of the Antelope HMA is 66 wild horses.

Under the project plan, the BLM will start gathering the horses through a bait and water trap or with helicopter assistance in late September or early October 2015 and continue to gather until objectives are achieved in the project area. The BLM will treat up to 15 mares with a fertility-control vaccine GonaCon-B and release them back into the project area along with an equal number of male wild horses. The BLM will monitor the treated mares and apply a booster every 20-24 months to maintain the vaccine's effectiveness. The BLM plans to remove 30-40 excess wild horses and offer them to the public for adoption through its Wild Horse and Burro Adoption Program.

The Water Canyon Wild Horse Growth Suppression final EA, Decision Record and Finding of No Significant Impacts can be accessed at <http://on.doi.gov/1PKK0Jg>. The BLM will release additional information regarding wild horse gather operations in the Water Canyon project area in the coming weeks. For more information, contact Ben Noyes, BLM Ely District wild horse and burro specialist, at (775) 289-1800.

WILDERNESS

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Ely Ranger District Wilderness Management Plan:

The final decision was signed in March 2015. The plan provides supplemental management direction for the preservation of wilderness character in the Ely Ranger District's nine wilderness areas and Bureau of Land Management-administered portion of the Mt. Moriah Wilderness.

Lands with Wilderness Characteristics: The BLM is performing project by project inventory updates for Lands with Wilderness Character.

SPECIAL LEGISLATION

Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA): The Executive Committee is scheduled in September 2015 to review the Round 15 recommendation prepared by the Sub-groups and reviewed by the Partners Working Group and public this spring and summer.

The nomination period closed in November 2014. The Ely District submitted seven projects; three under the Eastern Nevada Landscape Restoration Project addressing sage-grouse habitat, and state and transition models; three in the Conservation Initiatives category addressing cave management planning, and desert tortoise and Pahrump poolfish habitat; and one in Capital Improvement that would provide for trails in the

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Caliente area (*see Lincoln County Partners Multi-Purpose Non-Motorized Trail System, page 13*).

Lincoln County Archaeological Initiative (LCAI): The Partners Working Group in May 2015 reviewed a recommendation from the Archaeological Resources Team regarding proposals submitted under Round 8.

Funding for LCAI comes from revenues generated through the sale of public lands identified for disposal in the Lincoln County Lands Act and existing land-use plans. The Act created a special account in which 85-percent of the revenues from land sales are deposited. Funds in the special account may be used for a number of activities, including the study of archaeological resources in Lincoln County. The remaining funds are distributed to the State of Nevada (5-percent) and Lincoln County (10-percent).

To date the BLM has approved \$7,190,523 for archaeological projects in Lincoln County. Expenditures approved include documenting Paiute and Shoshone rock art sites, and oral histories and practices; archaeological site inventories; obsidian tool stone research; settlement pattern studies; educational brochures and websites; and upgrade of archaeological collections by inventorying, re-marking and repackaging of artifacts collected from public lands in Lincoln County.

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Contact Chris Hanefeld, BLM Ely District public affairs specialist, at (775) 289-1842 or chanefel@blm.gov for more information on these and other projects/programs in the BLM Ely District.